(a) by when the telephone facility is targeted to be provided in each village panchayat in the country;

(b) whether there is any difficulty in achieving this target in terrorism affected areas;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the action being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) entered into an agreement with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in November, 2004 for provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in remaining 66,822 unconnected villages in the country. This excludes villages having population less than 100, lying in thick forest areas/naxalite infested areas etc. As on 31st March, 2007, out of 66,822 unconnected eligible villages, 46,969 villages have been provided with VPT facility and the remaining 19,853 villages will be provided with VPTs progressively by November, 2007.

(b) to (d) Difficulties are being experienced in providing VPTs in some of the villages in naxalite affected areas of Bastar and Surguja of Chhattisgarh State and Raigarh, Nagaon and Silchar areas in the State of Assam. However, Government is making all efforts to provide telephone facility in such areas.

Reduction in roaming charges

3831. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a proposal from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is under consideration of Government with regard to reduction in roaming charges;

(b) whether the Cellular Operators Association of India is resisting this move to reduce roaming tariffs; and

(c) whether the COAI has contended that telecom tariffs in India are among the lowest in the world and further attempts to regulate roaming tariff would force them to revise upward the regular tariff ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEELAHMAD): (a) to (c) The roaming charges levied by different operators have to be within the ceiling tariff prescribed by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). TRAI, after due consultation process with all the stakeholders found justifiable grounds for a review of the tariff structure applicable for roaming services that had been fixed five years back.

The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) had submitted that the customer tariffs are already lowest in the world and consistently coming down and thus, roaming tariffs should also be left to market forces.

Based on in-depth analysis of various elements of cost, data on costs, views of stakeholders, the prevailing tariff for calls originated in home networks and other relevant factors, TRAI has prescribed a composite ceiling charges for regional/national roaming effective from 15th February, 2007. The Cellular Operators have already revised roaming tariff accordingly.

Applications under RTI Act

3832. DR. GYAN PRAKASH PILANIA:
SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of number of applications received under Right to Information Act by his Ministry and associated Departments; and their disposal;

(b) those which have been replied in time;

(c) those whom information has been denied;

(d) those which have either not been replied or replied with wrong information; and

(e) whether Government have ordered inquiry and taken suitable action against erring officers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEELAHMAD): (a) to (d)